

HIS BEATITUDE THE PATRIARCH OF JERUSALEM VISITS MOUNT ATHOS

On the morning of Saturday, the 24th of July/6th of August 2016, His Beatitude Theophilos, Patriarch of Jerusalem, commenced His already announced visit to the Agion Oros.

The Patriarch was accompanied by the Elder Secretary-General, Archbishop Aristarchos of Constantina, the Secretary of the Holy Synod, Archbishop Demetrios of Lydda, Archbishop Nektarios of Anthedon, the Exarch in Athens, Archimandrite Damianos, Hierodeacon Markos, and Mr Theodoros Yiangou, Professor in the Faculty of Theology at the Aristotle University of Salonika.

In the early hours of the aforementioned day, His Beatitude left from Salonika for Ouranopolis and from there, at 9:30 am, He sailed for the port of Daphne. Upon His arrival, He was welcomed by the representatives of the Xeropotamos and Simonos Petras Monasteries, fathers Paul and Ieronymos respectively.

From Daphne the Patriarch left for Karies, where He was welcomed by the four representatives of the Holy *Epistasia*, the Executive Committee of Mount Athos. At the entrance to the church of the Dormition of Theotokos, Patriarch Theophilos was welcomed by representatives of all twenty monasteries on Mount Athos.

There, His Beatitude put on a mantle and venerated the Gospel, as cantors of the Monasteries of Vatopedi and Simonos Petras sang the "Axion Esti".

After venerating the icon of Theotokos' Axion Esti, the Patriarch led Doxology.

The President of the Community of Mount Athos, representative of the Vatopedi Monastery, f. Barnabas, then addressed Patriarch Theophilos, and was followed by the Patriarch's reply speech.

In His address, the Patriarch spoke of the beneficial and salvaging work carried on by the Church of Jerusalem through the centuries. "With the help and protection of great emperors, e.g. St Constantine and his mother, St Helena, Theodosius the Great, Justinian and others, the Pan-Orthodox and Pan-Christian holy site, the fulcrum of our faith, the Church of the Resurrection and the Basilica of the Nativity in Bethlehem, was first built, followed by Monasteries, Cenobia and Lavrae". In these sites of veneration, Patriarch Theophilos said, the Church of Jerusalem attests to this day, among heterodox and followers of other religions, to the synergy of Christ's two natures, the divine and the human, in a single hypostasis, according to the Christological doctrine of the Fourth Ecumenical Synod in Chalcedon. In closing, His Beatitude asked for a renewal and strengthening of the spiritual ties between the Agion Oros and the Patriarchate of Jerusalem, so that Fathers from Mount Athos may be informed of the Patriarchate's work and that Hagiotaphite Fathers can visit Mount Athos and learn of the cenobitic and ascetic way of life.

After the exchange of gifts, His Beatitude was addressed by the hegumen of the Monastery of Stavronikitas, Hieromonk Nathaniel. In replying, the Patriarch spoke of the inextricable ties between the Mother of Churches and Mount Athos, expressed through the flow of history by monks of Jerusalem and Mount Athos, joined by their ascetic traditions. The ecumenical ascetic figures of the Holy Land, the Patriarch said, cultivated an infertile land with their virtues and stand to this day as role models for the Fathers of Mount Athos too. "The continuous immigration of monks between these two spiritual centres [...] and above all the unparalleled

contribution of both these sanctified and spiritual sites towards the formulation of Orthodox worship [...] shortened distances and joined the spirits and hearts of Mount Athites and Jerusalemites”, the Patriarch remarked.

From Karies, the Patriarch returned to Daphne and from there He sailed for the Holy Skete of St Anna. There, He was warmly welcomed by Hieromonk Ioannis, hegumen of the cell of the Dormition of Theotokos, and others.

In the evening, the Patriarch walked to the katholikon of St Anna Skete, where He was addressed by the hegumen of the Monastery of the Great Lavra, Hieromonk Prodromos.

The Patriarch went on to lead the night-long vigil for the feast of the Dormition of St Anna, having as co-officiants Archbishops Aristarchos of Constantina, Demetrios of Lydda, Nektarios of Anthedon and a plethora of Hieromonks, Mount Athites and the Exarch in Athens, Archbishop Damianos. Monks and pilgrims, numbering approximately 500, attended the vigil.

The divine Liturgy was indeed a communion of heaven and earth, a descent of heaven to earth and rise of the earth to heaven; rise of the congregation to the kingdom of God, that was given to earth through the Incarnate, Crucified and Resurrected Jesus Christ.

The divine Liturgy was followed by lunch, during which His Beatitude addressed the hegumen of the Great Lavra, commemorating the life of the barren St Anna who neither despaired nor stopped praying to God and was therefore rewarded with a great gift, the ever-Virgin Mary who would go on to bear the Incarnate Jesus Christ. Likewise, the Patriarch said, we pray to God to allow us to bear the Orthodox testimony in the Holy Land and “to complete the already launched project for the restoration of the Aedicula of the Holy Sepulchre for the glory of God and the praise of the blessed race of the Rum Orthodox”.

From the Secretariat-General

